

## 2 Samuel: 6-14

6-7 - The Ark is brought to Jerusalem and God establishes a Covenant with David forever.

David's relationship with God has already been noted as one of deep loyalty and intimacy. David's goal is to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the capital, and build a permanent home for it (a temple) there. Up to this point, the Ark has traveled here and there, at times on the battlefield, and always under a tent with priests in charge of it.

But this plan is interrupted by the sudden death of a priest attending the Ark. His death is interpreted as an act of God, and David sees this as God's way of saying 'no' to the Ark coming to Jerusalem. The Ark was a very sacred object, and in the ancient world, sacred objects were dangerous. Thus, David houses it with a person who volunteers for the task. As this person's house is blessed for this act (over a 3-month period), David believes this is a sign from God that the time is right to continue the procession of the Ark to Jerusalem.

There is a colourful description of the entry to Jerusalem. There are thousands of soldiers protecting the procession, and there is dancing that takes place in advance of the Ark. David is part of all this celebration, and in his ecstasy, he is unaware of his dress (he has few clothes on). The celebration (singing, dancing and making music) would indicate not only joy but also praise to the Lord. The only person who objects is Michal (Saul's daughter). We don't know why she despises David so much. But David responds in kind and because of her attitude, he deprives her of the privilege of being a mother.

In what follows (7), we have a declaration of God toward David through the prophet Nathan (Samuel's successor). Even though David wants to build a permanent home for the Ark, that privilege will pass to his offspring after him. Nonetheless, God will establish David's house forever. A covenant is a binding agreement. God's covenant with Adam, with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses and Israel, were all binding. Disobedience and sin will have consequences, sometimes terribly severe ones, but God will never sever the tie that binds. So it is with the house of David. God will never abandon God's commitment to it. David's response is appropriate humility, gratitude and praise. He is a man after God's heart in all this.

8-10 - David's commitments and successes.

David acts kindly to Jonathan's surviving son (9). David also succeeds in all the battles he fights (8,10). All the killing, cruelty and enslavement that takes place should not be seen as unusual for the times. Nonetheless, we cannot base our ideas of right and wrong on such actions, nor is there a direct link between the spirit of the 10 commandments and the violent behaviour of Israel and its King. Sadly, many "Christians" throughout history to the present day, have found justification for their own violent ways by patterning themselves after David who supposedly was a man after

God's own heart. His strategy and violence was a requirement for success in war, but not necessarily in life's relationships, as we shall see.

## 11-12 - David's Fall

Even though God has made a covenant with David that is irrevocable, God will deal severely with David's sin. There is a lesson here. Those who are closest to God are also expected to be measured by the highest standards. With the privilege comes the responsibility, as David will find out.

The sin with Bathsheba reveals the temptations for a King. He can believe that he can have whatever he wants without consequence. Second, the more he tries to fix the problem the worse it gets. Bathsheba is not necessarily a willing participant. In that world, a man of standing could ask for a woman, and she would have no choice but to respond, unless there was another man of standing with whom negotiations would have to take place. David could have had Bathsheba only if her husband did not exist. The sin is accentuated by the fact that Uriah is off fighting the King's battles (he is probably a mercenary (a Hittite and not an Israelite), while the king is taking his wife to bed.

Once Bathsheba is pregnant (she sends word to David) David brings Uriah back from the fighting and tells him to go home (presumably to sleep with his wife and eliminate the suspicion that her pregnancy is due to another man's involvement). But Uriah is a good soldier, and he refuses to relax and enjoy himself when his men are out fighting. Thus, David has to find another solution. He sends word to Joab to engineer Uriah's death. No doubt, Joab's actions (pulling the ranks back at the last minute) involve the death of a number of good soldiers. This was bad strategy, and he was worried that once David heard of it, he would be upset with Joab. But Joab also has the messenger tell David that Uriah is dead. This appeases David, who rationalizes it all - 'For the sword devours now one and now another.'

Nathan the prophet finds out. His way of capturing David in his own deception is with the use of a parable. As King, David would have been involved in settling many disputes. In the case of the story Nathan tells him, the judgment is very clear. A great injustice has been committed. The person who has committed it must die. Well, Nathan tells David, 'You are the man.' David is shocked but makes the connection. He accepts the verdict. He is guilty. But his repentance pays off. He will not die. God will forgive him. But there will be severe consequences, beginning with the death of the child born to Bathsheba. We shall see as the story progresses that this is one of many heartbreaking disasters that will befall David and his family.

## 13-14 - Tamar, Amnon and Absalom

Sin multiplies upon sin. David's oldest son is desperate for his younger stepsister. She is a virgin. Even though technically, this would be considered incest, rules for kings families and those of nobles could be circumvented. If Amnon asked for Tamar's hand in marriage, David would have probably acquiesced. At least that is Tamar's thought when Amnon tries to seize her. She wants to preserve her honour. Her virginity must only be

broken from a man who will marry her legitimately. Amnon, however, is not interested in commitment or marriage, but only in appeasing his lust. He takes her by force (rapes her) and sends her out. She laments her lot and mourns it publicly, so that her brother Absalom finds out. He tells her to leave it with him and he begins his scheming. It takes two years for him to devise a plan. He has Amnon killed and then runs away. Terror fills the King's household and there is a split between Absalom and the rest of the family. Joab, to his credit, devises a way to repair the split. Through a wise woman, he persuades the king that Absalom can be restored without having to pay the price of an eye for an eye. The process takes place, but the restoration is not complete. David forgives Absalom by kissing him, but this only happens because Absalom forces a meeting. The resentment is growing and as we shall see in the next chapter, Absalom will scheme to take the throne from his father.

What Lessons can we learn from these chapters?

1) Sin may pay off in the moment or in the short term, but long term, the consequences can be severe. How can we learn to exercise better restraint and wisdom in the short term, so that we will be on the right track in the long term? Relationships are not easily restored, and some things just can't be taken back or replaced. Trust is also difficult to re-establish after it has been broken. People carry traumas and hurt throughout their lives even when they want to forgive.

2) For all his emphasis on justice, David does not deal with the sin of Amnon, and this precipitates Absalom's violent attempt to redress the wrong. It also begins a process of conflict within David's family that will only get worse.

3) What is it about David that God loves? It can't be the violence. It can't be the sin. It is David's loyalty and faithfulness to God. God is always the focus of his gratitude for his success and blessings. David never presumes to believe that he has earned his success by his own ingenuity, strength, wisdom and so on. Yes, he has many gifts, but he was just a shepherd boy when God found him (through Samuel who then anointed him). David has appropriate humility and a child-like spirit of gratitude and service before God. This God loves.

4) David allows for criticism against him to be permitted. He does not eliminate it by banishing or killing anyone who speaks against him. This includes the prophet Nathan, members of his family, and many others, as we shall see. David has not capitulated to the temptation of a tyrant or dictator. He continues to value the favour of the people and his reputation for fairness and justice.